



December 2009



Jodi Ross
Town Manager
978-692-5500

jross@westfordma.gov
www.westfordma.gov/tm

Department Spotlight

Paul Starratt, Town Engineer, presents ecological importance of watersheds and stormdrains to 5th grade students.

Joanne Sheehan, Council of Aging Director, receives the Title 111 grant from Elder Services of Merrimack Valley.

Paul Plouffe, Principal Assessor, installed as President of the Middlesex County Assessor's Association.

Cheryl Accardi, Tax Collector, receives her recertification as a Certified Massachusetts Municipal Collector.

Visit
www.westfordma.gov
for current news and
information.

Dear Westford Residents,

I hope all of you had a wonderful Thanksgiving. Winter has finally arrived and it looks like we will have snow this year after all...although some of us had hoped we might not!

The Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee have been conducting weekly meetings with department heads to review their proposed 2011 budgets. All of us remain concerned that revenues will remain flat, and the state will further reduce local aid to our town. Rest assured that we are actively examining contingencies if that occurs.

In an attempt to control and/or reduce expenses, on December 3rd both boards heard a presentation by Selectman Valerie Wormell and Finance Committee member Mark Kost on the next steps to identify expense reduction opportunities, or cost avoidances, by possibly consolidating some expenses into a Department of Public Works, not necessarily proposing a director at this time. Both boards believe there are possibilities to create efficiencies and improve service beyond what we are already accomplishing. In many ways our department heads already function in a consolidated, cooperative, resource sharing manner, and have

been able to deliver excellent service in doing so. Selectmen Wormell and Mr. Kost are meeting with all boards, committees, department heads, and other interested parties hearing their concerns and suggestions. A web page is dedicated to this course of action, and is available at www.westfordma.gov.

The Board of Selectmen, with support from the Finance Committee, recently voted in favor of instituting some form of solid waste reduction program, in an attempt to reduce solid waste expenses. The Recycling Commission appealed to the boards to allow them the chance to reduce solid waste in the town, through a community-wide education program. The board agreed to allow them to attempt this goal; however they are interested in seeing measurable progress and assigning a timeline to the achievement of this reduction. The board authorized us to issue a regional Request for Proposals (RFP) with Chelmsford in an attempt to lower solid waste tipping fees. We will be issuing this RFP in December and are hopeful for lowered costs.

Recently there has been a flurry of sandwich board signs appearing on the common. The town allows just four signs at

one time, and there is a permitting process through the town manager's office. Please find the policy on the town manager's webpage, and realize the approvals are "first come – first served". Thanks for helping us adhere to this policy.

The construction of the Cameron Senior Center and Town Hall continues according to schedule, and we are posting pictures on our website to document and share progress. Thanks again to the members of the Permanent Town Building Committee and town staff who are doing such a great job overseeing these projects.

The Board of Health and town staff continue to work to protect residents and employees from catching the H1N1 (Swine) Flu. Please note updates on both our town's website and in later articles in this newsletter.

I wish all of you a wonderful holiday season.

Sincerely,

Jodi Ross



Health Department News

Updated flu news-Priority groups expanded for H1N1

We are pleased to notify residents that thanks to some recent shipments of H1N1 vaccine, the Health Departments in the Upper Merrimack Valley have pooled their vaccine for a regional clinic. This has allowed us **to expand vaccination to the priority groups** listed below.



REGIONAL HINI CLINIC

Date: Saturday, December 12th, 2009

Time: 10-1

Location: Westford Academy
30 Patten Rd.

For the following priority groups:

- Pregnant women and household contacts
- Caregivers, daycare workers and household contacts of children 6 months and younger
- Persons ages 1-24 yrs of age
- Health Care Provider with direct patient care
- High Risk individuals ages 25-64 with the following conditions
 - heart disease (excluding hypertension)
 - diabetes
 - pulmonary disease including asthma
 - renal and liver disease
 - neuromuscular disease
 - Immunosuppressed individuals

No appointments are needed or accepted. Walk in only. Limited vaccine available on a first - come first -served basis. Both nasal mist and shots will be given and all will be screened for eligibility.

This clinic is for the residents of Billerica, Chelmsford, Lowell, Tewksbury, Tyngsboro and Westford only.



Sponsored by the Health Departments of the above named city and towns as well as volunteers from the Upper Merrimack Valley Medical Reserve Corps

On a positive note, federal state and local surveillance systems have shown a small decrease in influenza like illness over the past 3 weeks. This is based on reported cases of influenza like illness provided by physicians/hospitals and EMS, in combination of statistics our department has obtained by



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tracking students and staff absenteeism rates. Although residents may interpret the data that influenza activity has peaked and is on a decline, it is important to note that activity is still at a level that is significantly higher than what was seen at the same time during the last two years. In Massachusetts, since April we have seen over 4600 confirmed cases of which 345 persons have been hospitalized and 26 people have died. We continue to encourage everyone not to let down their guard but continue to stay home when ill, practice good hand and cough etiquette and to get immunized!

*****Please note that until further notice we will not be accepting any appointments to have vaccinations done in our office for either H1N1 or seasonal vaccine. *****

Any questions, please call our office at 978-692-5509. Please continue to follow updates on www.westfordma.gov and sign up for our list serve for the most current and timely information as this flu season remains very fluid.

Seasonal Flu/Pneumonia Public Clinic



The following **seasonal** flu clinic has been arranged. Please note that this is for **seasonal** flu vaccine only. As all of our vaccine from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health has now arrived, this will potentially be our last seasonal flu clinics.

Date: December 17th
Time: 5-7 pm
Location: Millennium School
Priority Group: General population ages 2 and above

Walk in. No appointments taken. First -come, first -served basis. Limited supply. Westford residents only!

Protect Your Family: A Guide to Water Quality Testing for Private Wells

If you have a private well, then water quality testing should be important to you and your family.

Some contaminants in drinking water have been linked to cancer and toxicity, posing a risk to human health. Many contaminants often have no taste, odor, or color. Their presence can only be determined by laboratory testing.

While there is no state requirement to have your well water tested (although there may be from your mortgage lender), the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) recommends that all homeowners with private wells do so, and use a state certified laboratory.



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Contamination of Wells

Well water originates as rain and snow that then filters into the ground. As it soaks through the soil, the water can dissolve materials that are present on or in the ground, becoming contaminated. Some contaminants are naturally occurring from features found in the rocks and soils of Massachusetts. These include substances like bacteria, radon, arsenic, uranium, and other minerals.

Other contaminants find their way onto the land from human activities. On a large scale, industrial/commercial activities, improper waste disposal, road salting, and fuel spills can introduce hazardous substances to the ground. However, even typical residential activities, such as the application of fertilizers and pesticides, fueling of lawn equipment, and disposal of household chemicals can contaminate the ground when done improperly. Even an on-site residential septic system can pose a threat to your well. That is why taking measures to protect your well from contamination is so important.

Contaminants and Testing Frequencies

Testing Frequency

Monitor initially for all contaminants, and then at a minimum of once every ten years (except for bacteria and nitrate/nitrite which should be sampled yearly).

Standard Analysis:

Arsenic, Chloride, Copper, Fluoride, Hardness, Iron, Lead, Manganese, pH, Sodium, Coliform Bacteria, Nitrate/Nitrite, Radon, Gross Alpha Screen (Bedrock Wells Only) VOC's. Additional recommendations: Perchlorate and Uranium

Recommended Tests

The following tests provide only the most basic indicators of a well's water quality. These tests identify some of the common natural and man-made contaminants found in our state's well water. However, you should also consider nearby land uses to decide whether additional tests are appropriate for your well. It is not necessary to do all of the tests at one time.

This basic analysis covers the most common contaminants. Some of these contaminants pose health-related concerns, while others only affect aesthetics (taste and odor).



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Radon

Radon can be a well water problem in Massachusetts, especially in bedrock wells. Presently, there are no federal or state standards for radon in drinking water, only suggested action levels. [Note: If Radon levels are elevated in your well water, you should also consider checking your indoor radon levels.]

Gross Alpha Screen

Radioactive minerals, such as radium and uranium, may be dissolved in well water. A Gross Alpha Screen is a simple test to judge whether further testing for specific radioactive minerals such as radium or uranium might be needed.

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs)

The most common VOCs come from gasoline compounds (such as MtBE and benzene) and industrial solvents (such as TCE). MtBE can be found in well water even in remote areas.

Additional Tests

Circumstances relative to your well may require additional testing not described here. For instance, MassDEP does not recommend frequent testing for things like pesticides, herbicides, or synthetic organic compounds, mainly because of the high cost. However, such testing might be warranted if your water has elevated nitrite/nitrate concentrations or significant amounts of pesticide have been applied near the well. These less-routine tests may not be performed at all state certified laboratories.

When To Test

MassDEP recommends that prospective homebuyers test the water in a home with a private well before purchase. Water quality in wells is generally stable, and if a change is going to occur, it occurs slowly. Thus the interval between water quality tests, once you've purchased the home, can generally be in terms of years if a well is properly constructed and located in a safe area. However, the following conditions would prompt more frequent testing:

- Heavily developed areas with land uses that handle hazardous chemicals.
- Recent well construction activities or repairs. MassDEP recommends taking a bacterial test after any well repair or pump or plumbing modification, but only after disinfection and substantial flushing of the water system.
- Contaminant concentrations above state or federal standards found in earlier testing.



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- Noticeable variations in quality like a water quality change after a heavy rain, extended drought, or an unexplained change in a previously trouble-free well (i.e. funny taste, cloudy appearance, etc.).

When taking any sample, MassDEP recommends that it be taken after a heavy rainstorm. These events tend to highlight conditions of improper well construction or poor soil filtration.

What the Tests Tell You

Results will reveal the level at which any of the tested substances were found in your water sample. The mere presence of these contaminants in well water does not necessarily imply that there is a problem. However, when levels exceed state or federal health standards, you should take steps to correct the situation. Several methods are available from commercial contractors to treat contaminated water.

For More Information

As private wells in Massachusetts are regulated at the local level, you should first contact the Westford Health Department about our town's private well testing requirements. For more information about private wells, including additional water quality testing recommendations, you should refer to the MassDEP Private Well Guidelines, which are available on the Drinking Water Program's web page at <http://www.mass.gov/dep/water/drinking/privatew.htm>. Other information, such as the listing of state certified laboratories, can also be accessed through their web site. Also, the Westford Health Department's Water Supply regulations can be found at the Town of Westford website at www.westfordma.gov/publichealth.



Holiday Safety Message
Lt. Donald R. Parsons
Fire Prevention Officer



The Holiday Season is upon us and there are many different ways people celebrate. We ask for everyone to follow a few simple steps to keep your home safe for your family and guests this holiday season.

Candles are used in many holiday traditions and we ask you to be especially careful this time of year. When using candles remember the Circle of Safety which is keeping anything free that can burn one-foot away or think of a basket ball cut in half with the candle in the middle and nothing near the edge of the circumference of the ball. Never leave burning candles unattended or allow them to burn down too close to the holder. Should you have young children or pets place candles where they cannot be reached or knocked over.

Electric Lights can be displayed in many different ways and often are used year after year. Make sure they are listed by an approved testing agency such as Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) or Factory Mutual (FM). Check for frayed wires, broken plugs or sockets. Replace, discard worn or damaged lights as it is less expensive than the cost of having a fire. Avoid overloading extension cords and plugs. Use no more than three strands of lights on a single extension cord.

Verify your **Outdoor decorations** are rated for outdoor use. Securely anchor outdoor lights and decorations against wind and storms. Outdoor electrical decorations should be plugged into a ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) and a properly sized outdoor electrical extension cord. Do not drive nails or staples or tacks through electrical wiring use insulated holders or hooks.

Live trees and evergreens are a holiday tradition that can be beautiful as aromatic. Never use a cut tree in a place of public assembly (office, hotel lobbies, restaurants or places of worship). Be sure to water live trees every day and place them in a sturdy stand so it cannot be knocked over. Keep candles away from evergreens and make sure electrical bulbs do not touch the evergreen or tree. Turn off the lights when leaving the house or going to bed for the night. Often forgotten dispose of your tree and evergreens soon after the holidays for once they dry out they become fuel for a fire both inside and outside your home. Keep in mind an abandoned tree is frequently attractive to vandals so take advantage of your community's tree pick-up day sponsored by the Westford Firefighters Association for a donation of \$7.00 January 9th and 10th 2010.

From all of us at the Westford Fire Department we wish to extend to you and your family Happy Holidays. Keep it safe, Test your Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms and make sure you have a house number on your home 3 inches in height in a contrasting color not hidden by holiday decorations.



Highway Department News

Winter is a beautiful time of year in Westford, especially when a fresh layer of new snow blankets everything. Winter can also be a very dangerous time of year. If you plan on traveling during the winter, it pays to prepare your vehicle for winter driving, including having winter car supplies. Just following some simple safe driving tips and using common sense while driving near snow plows could insure that you make it to your destination safely. However, be prepared for the unexpected! Know what to do in case you're stranded or in a car accident.

Preparing your vehicle for winter driving – Reliable transportation is especially important in the winter. Not only should you keep your vehicle in top operating condition all year round, for safety and fuel economy, it is especially important to get it winterized to avoid any unpleasant or dangerous situation while traveling in frigid weather. We advise all motorists to check the following:

- Ignition system
- Fuel system
- Belts
- Fluid levels
- Brakes
- Exhaust system
- Wiper blades and windshield washer fluid
- Snow tires
- Tire and tread pressure
- Defroster
- Proper grade oil
- Cooling system
- Battery
- Lights
- Antifreeze

Always fill the gasoline tank before a long trip or even for a short distance. Stop to fill up long before the tank begins to run low. Keeping your tank as full as possible will minimize condensation, providing the maximum advantage in case of trouble.

Winter car supplies – Keep winter car supplies that can assist you in case of emergency. You can easily equip your vehicle with essential gear for winter. Here's what you'll need:

- Booster cables
- Two or more blankets
- Snow shovel and scraper
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Extra clothing: cap, mittens, parka and overshoes or boots in case you have to walk for help

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- High calorie, non-perishable food like granola bars and canned nuts
- Sand or strips of carpet for traction
- Extra windshield washer fluid and antifreeze
- Cloth/paper towels

Safe winter driving tips:

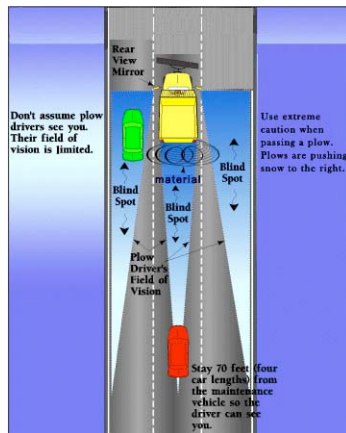
- Clear snow and ice from all windows and lights – even the hood and roof BEFORE driving.
- Leave plenty of room for stopping.
- Pay attention – don't try to out drive the conditions. Remember the posted speed limits are for dry pavement.
- Know the current road conditions. You can call 511 from your cell phone or (617) 374-1234 from either your cell phone or landline phone.
- Use brakes carefully. Brake early. Brake correctly. It takes more time and distance to stop in adverse conditions.
- Bridge decks freeze first. Due to the difference in the exposure to air, the surface condition can be worse on a bridge than on the approach road.
- Exit ramps are an even greater challenge during the winter since they may have received less anti-icing material than the main line. Be aware of this when exiting the highway.
- Don't use the "cruise control" option while driving in wintry conditions. Even roads that appear clear can have sudden slippery spots and the slightest touch of your brakes to deactivate the cruise control can cause you to lose control of your vehicle.
- Don't get overconfident in your 4x4 vehicle. Remember that, if you are driving a four wheel drive vehicle, the vehicle may help you get going quicker, but it won't help you to stop any quicker. Many 4x4 vehicles are heavier than passenger vehicles and actually take longer to stop.
- Look further ahead in traffic than you normally do. Actions by other cars and trucks will alert you quicker to problems and give you a split-second extra time to react safely.
- Remember that trucks are heavier than cars. Trucks take longer to safely respond and come to a complete stop. Please avoid cutting quickly in front of them.
- Leave room for maintenance vehicles and plows. Stay back at least 200 feet and don't pass on the right!
- Most importantly, please remember to slow down! Also, seat belts should be worn at all times – it's the law.



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Use common sense while driving near plows:

- Remember that the road in front of the plow is usually in much worse condition than the roadway behind the plow. Plows will typically travel very slowly and there is always a temptation to pass them. For your safety, it is recommended that you stay a safe distance behind the snowplows.
- During plowing operations, visibility can be reduced by blowing snow and plow operators may need time to stop or move over to avoid stranded vehicles. Keeping a safe distance between your vehicle and the plow is very important in order to avoid accidents.
- Allow plenty of room when passing a snowplow. Do not cut back into the lane ahead of the plow too quickly since the blade extends several feet ahead of the truck. Some snowplows are equipped with a "wing plow", an eight-foot extension off the side of the truck. Be aware that the hazard exists.
- When you see an approaching snowplow on an undivided roadway, move as far away from the center line as you safely can, since blowing snow may obscure the actual width of the snowplow's blade.
- Turn on your lights – to see and to be seen! Brush the snow off your headlights and taillights frequently.



The Westford Highway Department wishes one and all a very happy, safe holiday season!



ENERGY COMMITTEE

Energy is everyone's mind, whether for environmental reasons or economic ones. The Town Of Westford recognized last year that our town government needs to include energy as one of our municipal responsibilities for these same reasons. From a purely fiscal perspective, if we could start to reduce the \$2.5M we have to budget annually for our town buildings' heating and electric needs, we could free up funds for other municipal services, and reduce our carbon footprint in the process.

In early 2009, the Board of Selectman created the Westford Energy Committee with the charter "*To advise and assist the town by researching, identifying, designing, recommending and implementing programs and equipment to encourage and achieve energy efficiency and conservation.*" A nine member volunteer committee was appointed and has been working throughout the year on five focus areas, and has already completed projects that will save the town over \$47,000 annually:

- **Renewable Energy Generation** – projects that create energy for the town from renewable sources, such as solar and wind. The committee received 12 hours of free consulting from the Cadmus Group (\$1,200+ value) to identify the best sites for solar panel installations. An RFP for one of these projects has been issued, and a second is planned for early 2010.
- **Energy Efficiency** – projects that make our existing municipal structures more efficient, such as replacing selected lighting, ventilation and air conditioning equipment as well as improving control systems for vending machines, boilers, and pumps. This year, 3 school projects were reviewed and completed for an estimated \$20,000 in annual savings.
- **New Building/Renovation Efficiency** – projects that ensure new municipal buildings or renovations incorporate energy-efficient designs, such as south-facing windows for passive solar heating and insulation, doors, and windows that exceeds standard building codes;
- **Operations** – administrative activities and interactions with other town committees. A review of electric rate trends and our contract with our electricity supplier led the Energy Committee to recommend to the Board of Selectmen that we negotiate a new "blend and extend" contract that will save an estimated \$26,000 annually.
- **Information** – activities, such as this newsletter section, that shares progress and offers tips for how you can do your part to reduce energy use.

Best of all, the Energy Committee has been leveraging state and federal grants to achieve these cost savings, at no cost to the Town of Westford. The committee believes that town-wide energy reductions of 10% to 20% can be achieved with no impact on quality of service, and will continue looking at ways to reduce energy costs at our 13 municipal buildings.

If you'd like to learn more or participate, the committee invites you to attend the open meetings held at 7:00pm on the first and third Mondays of each month in the police station training room.

This Month's Energy Committee Tips:

1. **LED Holiday Lights** – Are your old holiday lights no longer working? Replace them with LED lights. A standard incandescent mini-light string uses 0.5-1 watt per bulb. New LED light strings use .05-.07 watts per bulb, for up to 95% savings in electricity!
2. **Pull the Plug** – Did you know cell phone chargers, electric pencil sharpeners, and tons of other small appliances draw energy even when they're not in use? An easy way to save on your electric bill is to simply unplug them!



ASSESSORS' OFFICE

The new FY 2010 assessments are now available on-line. You can use the property lookup tools on www.westfordma.gov or go to <http://westford.patriotproperties.com/default.asp> to access the assessors' database to view your new assessments.

Tax bills will be out for January 1. The assessors' office will be accepting Real Estate and Personal Property abatement applications from January 1, 2010 to February 1, 2010. Abatement applications are for disputes in assessments only, not your taxes. Once an application is submitted, the taxpayer or owner of record will be contacted for an inspection of the property in question or asked for further supporting documentation. The Board of Assessors has 3 months to act on an abatement application. If you are granted an abatement you will be notified with an Abatement Certificate and the difference will be deducted from your tax bill. If you are denied, you will be notified via certified mail that your application has been denied. In either situation, you have the right to appeal with the Appellate Tax Board in Boston.